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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 000022

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/04/2015

TAGS: PREL AL JO IZ BA

SUBJECT: IRAQ ELECTION DEMARCHE: BAHRAIN ASKS ABOUT ELECTION DELAY REPORTS, REMAINS CONCERNED ABOUT IRAN

REF: A. 04 STATE 275109 B. 04 STATE 274965

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe. Reason: 1.4 (B)(D)

¶1. (C) Ambassador delivered on January 4 to Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Mohammed Abdel Ghaffar demarches on the January 6 Iraq Neighbors Conference and January 9 Arab League Meeting (Ref A) and support for the international mission for Iraq elections (Ref B). Iraq also figured heavily in a January 4 meeting the Ambassador held with Minister of Defense Gen. Khalifa Al-Khalifa.

¶2. (C) Both Abdel Ghaffar and Gen. Khalifa, in addition to dwelling on long-standing fears about excessive Iranian influence in the elections, queried the Ambassador on a statement by Iraq Defense Minister Hazem Shaalan in Cairo, prominently reported in the local press, which raised the possibility of postponing the elections. According to this report, Shaalan told reporters that he has asked Egypt and Gulf countries to try to persuade Sunnis to participate in the election. "And if they agreed," he said, "then we could postpone the date to let all Iraqis go to the polls in one day." To both Ministers, Ambassador stressed that there was no plan to delay the elections and that, in any event, there was no evidence of any Sunnis coming forward to say that they would participate if there were a delay in the elections.

¶3. (C) Abdel Ghaffar stated that DPM/FM Sheik Mohammed Al-Khalifa would represent Bahrain at the Iraq Neighbors Conference in Amman, and that Abdel Ghaffar would represent Bahrain at the Arab League meeting. He said that at these meetings Bahrain would maintain its support for the elections and stability in Iraq, while opposing Iranian influence there. On that latter point, he (and Defense Minister Khalifa) went on at some length, raising concerns, for example, that Iranian agents had completely infiltrated Iraqi intelligence services in southern Iraq and flooded the region with Iranian-based voters. Asked what the Bahraini leadership thought of the relatively moderate message SCIRI's Abdel Aziz Al Hakim brought during his recent visit to Bahrain, Abdel Ghaffar acknowledged that his message was indeed moderate but that he did not like the idea of clerical leadership ruling Iraq.

¶4. (C) Comment: While fully supportive of our policy on Iraq, including the need to move forward with elections, Bahrain would be sympathetic to a delay in the elections if that would help check post-election Iranian influence in Iraq.

¶4. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
MONROE